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RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY 4194
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C O N F I D E N T I A L JAKARTA 000767

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP, EAP/MTS, EAP/MLS, EAP/ANP, EAP/RSP
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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [MARR](#) [ID](#)

SUBJECT: PAPUA -- AMID ONGOING TENSIONS, ARMY RIOT QUICKLY
QUASHED

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: An army battalion in Jayapura--the capital of restive Papua Province in eastern Indonesia--rioted when their commander ordered them to pay for the burial expenses of a fellow soldier. Sources told us that the commander was widely suspected of skimming money from the funds allocated to pay for soldiers' support. Military officials quickly brought the situation under control. There was some damage and some injuries. The short-lived mutiny comes amid a spike in tensions in Papua. END SUMMARY.

SOLDIERS GONE WILD

¶2. (U) Members of the army's 751 battalion rioted and trashed their headquarters in Jayapura, the capital of eastern Indonesia's restive Papua province, on April 29. (Note: The unit is responsible for security on the Indonesia-Papua New Guinea border.) Several hundred troops ran amok, fired their weapons in the air and attacked journalists and several bystanders who were watching the melee. None of those attacked suffered serious injuries although several journalists' cameras were destroyed.

¶3. (U) The fracas started when the battalion commander Lt.Col. Labok Sihotang told soldiers that they would have to pay for the cost of transporting the body of a dead comrade to his hometown for burial. (Note: The soldier in question had died following an unspecified illness.) As Sihotang fled the battalion HQ before the incident began, the rioting soldiers turned on the deputy commander. He reportedly suffered a severe head wound.

CORRUPTION ALLEGATIONS

¶4. (C) The burial payment dispute reportedly tapped into long-standing anger among personnel in the 751 battalion. Agus Sumule, a senior advisor to Papua governor Barnabas Suebu, told poloff that the provincial government has been concerned about the situation in the unit for some time. Soldiers had accused Sihotang of skimming money from the funds allocated to pay for battalion expenses. As a result, battalion personnel believed they were receiving substandard food and other supplies.

¶5. (C) Officials from the provincial military headquarters in Jayapura moved to end the incident quickly. Senior officials, including the provincial commander, met with the rioting soldiers and promised an investigation into the allegations of corruption against the commander. Military officials also promised an investigation of the soldiers' conduct during the riot.

PAPUAN TENSIONS

16. (C) The short-lived mutiny comes amid a heightening of tensions in the region. So far, there do not seem to be any political or ethnic tensions behind the April 29 incident. Since early April, however, there have been a number of violent incidents in the region pitting anti-Jakarta PapuansQ against security forces. While not directly linked to the ongoing tensions, the breakdown of command structure in this Indonesian military unit during the April 29 incident must be of concern against this troubled backdrop.

HUME